



29 November 2004



Army Family Action Plan Conference

1. The Army held its 21st Annual Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) Conference in November 2004. At the conference, 121 delegates discussed 96 complex, far-reaching Soldier and family-support issues vital to the well-being of the Army family, including entitlements, counseling services, employment, and family support. In addition, OCONUS commands were able to submit issues of critical concern directly to the AFAP program. USAREUR submitted the following two issues:

- **Funding for Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS) Summer School for Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade.** DODDS students should have the opportunity to attend summer school tuition-free.

- **Calculation of Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA) OCONUS.** Housing and utility allowances from FSSA calculations should be eliminated.

2. The main theme of this year's conference continued to be personal financial concerns. Of the 96 new issues that were discussed (available at http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_afap/home.asp), the top 5 were related to medical care, personal expenses, and leave. These issues (in priority order) are as follows:

- **Family Member Eyeglass Coverage.** No eyeglass coverage exists under TRICARE for family members of active-duty Soldiers and retirees. Delegates recommended funding part of the cost for eyeglasses under TRICARE, outsourcing eyeglass fabrication through contracted vendors at a reduced price, and having military laboratories provide Frame of Choice Program services at cost.

- **Expiration of TRICARE Referral Authorizations.** TRICARE automatically cancels the initial referral authorization when the beneficiary is unable to get an appointment with a specialty clinic or provider within the 28-day standard. Delegates recommended eliminating the automatic expiration of the initial TRICARE referral authorization.

- **Childcare Fee Category.** Families with significantly different incomes are paying the same fee in each childcare category. Delegates recommended increasing the number of categories to reduce the financial variance within each category and increasing the number of fee ranges to reflect the new categories while maintaining existing fee-range parameters.

- **Calculation of CONUS Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA).** Families stationed in CONUS generally do not qualify for FSSA because the calculation method includes basic allowance for housing (BAH). Delegates recommended eliminating BAH from income calculations for FSSA.

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- **Leave Accrual.** Increased mission requirements leave little opportunity for Soldiers to use accrued leave. Delegates recommended allowing Soldiers to carry up to 90 days of leave until their expiration term of service.

3. The concentration on financial concerns affected the emphasis given to previously submitted issues and those being worked. The top six active AFAP issues (in addition to those above) include—

- Allowing Soldiers with 10 years of service to distribute their Montgomery GI Bill benefits to their family members. This was also priority #1 in 2003.
- Giving “in-state tuition” status to family members attending school in a U.S. State while residing in that State on military orders. This was priority #2 in 2003.
- Amending the enlisted portion of the permanent-change-of station weight-allowance table to more closely match officer weight-allowance authorizations. This was priority #4 in 2003.
- Awarding household-goods moving contracts to companies based on company performance, claims history, and cost; and providing the full-replacement value for lost or damaged goods. This was priority #6 in 2003.
- Providing authorizations and funding for all Army Community Service positions in support of well-being initiatives that support Army Community Service. This is a new issue.
- Providing Reserve Component Soldiers on active duty full BAH after 30 days and paying Reserve Component Soldiers on active duty for over 140 days the full BAH from the first day of activation. This is a new issue.

4. The AFAP “grassroots” process has identified Soldier and family issues to senior leaders since 1983 and has raised over 525 issues that resulted in legislative or policy changes and improved programs and services. Your suggestions and involvement are critical to this process. I strongly encourage you to participate in the AFAP to help make our great Army even better. Contact your base support battalion for more details on the AFAP process.



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